



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

1721 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976
213-651-1040

CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
by HENRY A. WAXMAN
(D-Los Angeles)

September 6, 1983

U.S. BADLY NEEDS BROAD SOVIET STUDIES

The recent downing by the Soviet Union of a Korean Airlines' plane brought into sharp focus our short-comings in the area of Soviet studies. At first we were all stunned by the tragic and senseless loss of 269 lives. We were furious at the Soviet Union for undertaking this dastardly terrorist act. We were equally angry at the insulting and transparent lies the U.S.S.R. gave when it should have given an accurate and full explanation.

In the aftermath of the first week of news stories, my thoughts turned to a much broader area. How much do we know about the Soviet Union? (I do not mean "how good are we at gathering purely military intelligence?".) How well do we monitor the Soviet mass media of communications? Are our leaders properly briefed on the curriculum of Soviet education, and the attitude of the Soviet elite in various fields?

The answer to these questions is a resounding "no". Very few Americans are being trained in Russian language and culture. The number of American scholars familiar with the languages, life styles, and economics of the non-Russian areas of the U.S.S.R. is miniscule. Please note: barely half of what we call "Russia" is ethnically, linguistically, or religiously "Russian".

In our preoccupation with Soviet military matters, we have utterly neglected Soviet science and non-military technology. Every American leader grants that the internal economic affairs of the Soviet Union are of enormous importance for Soviet foreign policy. Yet only a handful of Americans, in or out of government, specializes in the study of Soviet economics.

Little would be accomplished by appropriating large amounts of money for the study of the fields delineated above. We are in such bad shape that few truly competent specialists are available to take advantage of any new research funds for advanced Soviet studies.

English is the second language throughout the Soviet Union. The Soviets maintain a huge, well-financed research institution for the study of American and Canadian affairs. This institution does not duplicate the spying work of Soviet espionage agencies. Rather, it attempts to generate the data which will allow Soviet leaders to figure out "what makes Americans tick". Soviet "American research" is generally poor quality, but at least they have a sensible goal.

.....MORE.....MORE.....MORE.....

As a start, we need to vastly increase the number of American high school and college students studying Russian language and history. We need to provide time and training for economists, scientists, and other specialists interested in establishing expertise on the Soviet Union and the Eastern European satellites. We especially need systematic research on the broad range of Soviet activities in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America!

There can be no debate over the thesis that the West in general, and the United States in particular, is light years ahead of the Soviet Union in every branch of the behavioral sciences and the humanities. We must put this rich national resource to use in interpreting Soviet policy and wisely formulating our own.

We will never understand the horrible attack on the Korean Airlines merely by pouring over transcripts of air traffic controller exchanges, or analyzing craft debris. Our goal must be to understand the mentality of Soviet pilots and their superiors, and the larger cultural insularity in which it flourishes.

###